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*THE GRAND PRINCE  
IN MUSCOVITE POLITICS:  
THE PROBLEM OF GENRE IN  
SOURCES ON IVAN'S MINORITY*

A commemoration of the life and reign of Ivan IV should by rights turn our attention to the paramount importance of the grand prince in Muscovite politics. Surely Ivan IV is the standard by which we understand political relations in Muscovy. Ivan, the youthful leader condemning the boyars' venal struggles during his youth; Ivan, perhaps paranoid, perhaps politically astute, thrusting Muscovy into chaos with the *Oprichnina*—these images testify to Ivan's forceful personality and to the power sovereigns could wield in court politics. Already advancing toward centralization and autocracy, Muscovy became all the more monolithically governed as Ivan expanded the army and bureaucracy and subjugated the boyars. Ivan's life and reign should convince us that Muscovite political life was as autocratic as its ritual and ideology declared it to be.

It will be argued here, however, that Muscovite politics was more complex than simple autocracy. Admittedly, no social force but the sovereign dynasty possessed a legitimate claim to power: neither the boyars nor the lesser military servitors enjoyed enfranchised political rights like those of some contemporary West and Central European nobilities. But Muscovy, unlike Europe, did not define political relations as corporate privileges and legal rights. Rather it relied on personal loyalties to structure politics, and maintained a complex political reality behind a facade of political simplicity. The complexity of Muscovite politics lies therein: boyar factions shared with the grand prince decision-making and leadership, but all participants in political life cultivated a facade of autocracy in ritual and in ideology. That ideology is found in narrative sources on political activity that might be said to constitute a "genre" of political writing; such compositions were shaped by prescribed views of human nature and historical causation and limited by an overriding didacticism. They include chronicles, historical tales in chronicles, compositions like the tales of the Time of Troubles, accounts like the protocols of the 1551 "Stoglav" Church Council, and even Grigorii Kotoshikhin's description of the court around the 1660s. If we read such sources sensitive to the dictates of their genre, we can better differentiate rhetoric from reality in sources and also explore how the sources' idealized imagery itself reveals political customs. Ivan IV's minority—encompassing the years from the death of Ivan's father in

1533, when Ivan was three, to 1547, when Ivan was crowned and married--provides a good case study for such inquiry.

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Historians customarily attribute to Ivan IV a dynamic personality and forceful role in the policy making of his time, but views have differed on the nature of politics at the court in general.<sup>1</sup> One interpretation formulated by pre-revolutionary scholars remains influential to this day: it attributes decisive leadership to the sovereign and otherwise finds little rationality in court political relationships. Although scholars who favored this approach differed in their evaluation of Ivan's psyche and accomplishments, they concurred in condemning the boyars as an obstructionist and selfish force in politics. This view derives largely from their interpretation of Ivan's minority. The years between 1533 and 1547 witnessed nearly fourteen murders, the depositions of two metropolitans, and at least three changeovers of ruling clique.<sup>2</sup> Exiles, forcible tonsures of men and their wives and children, and public humiliations of distinguished churchmen were the order of the day. And yet, according to V. O. Kliuchevskii, the boyars involved in these struggles lacked a political program: "Divided into the parties of the Shuiskii and Belskii princes, the boyars pursued bitter internecine struggles with each other on personal or family accounts, not on behalf of any sort of government order. . . . All [Russian society] saw that the boyar elite was an anarchistic force unless ruled with a strong hand."<sup>3</sup> S. F. Platonov similarly contrasted Ivan's central leadership to the chaos of boyar rule, which he scorned as "wild arbitrariness, behind which can be seen no sort of political program or defined principles." Platonov continued: "Thus all the boyar confrontations seem the result of

1. For discussions of historiography on Ivan, see: I. U. Budovnits, "Ivan Groznyi v russkoi istoricheskoi literature," *Istoricheskie zapiski* [hereafter *Iz*], 21 (1947), 270-330; M. S. Kurmacheva, "Ob otsenke deiatel'nosti Ivana Groznogo," *Voprosy istorii*, No. 9 (1956), pp. 195-203; Leo Yaresh, "Ivan the Terrible and the *Oprichnina*," in Cyril E. Black, ed., *Rewriting Russian History: Soviet Interpretations of Russia's Past*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 216-32; Robert O. Crummey, "Ivan the Terrible," in Samuel H. Baron and Nancy W. Heer, eds., *Windows on the Russian Past: Essays on Soviet Historiography since Stalin* (Columbus, Ohio: American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, 1977), pp. 57-74.

2. The murders included Princes Iurii and Andrei Ivanovich of the ruling family, Prince Mikhail Glinskii, Prince Ivan Vorotynskii, perhaps Elena Glinskaia, Prince Ivan Ovchina Obolenskii, Prince Ivan Bel'skii, Fedor Mishurin, Prince Andrei Shuiskii, two Vorontsov men, Prince Ivan Kubenskii, Prince Fedor Ovchinina Obolenskii, and Prince Ivan Dorogobuzhskii. The metropolitans were Daniil and Ioasaf.

3. V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii*, Part 2, in *Sochineniia v vos'mi tomakh*, 8 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1956-59), II, 164.

personal or family enmities, but not a struggle between parties or organized political circles."<sup>4</sup>

Only Ivan IV's disgust at the boyars' carryings-on put an end to the petty squabbles of the boyars. According to Platonov, the turning point came in 1543. "The outrage [a public humiliation] to [the boyar] Vorontsov exceeded the measure of Ivan's patience. Ivan was already thirteen years old. He hated the Shuiskii as his perpetual tormentors and determined to have revenge for their abuses."<sup>5</sup> In S. M. Solov'ev's account, "The young grand prince had to begin his reign with an assault on the primary magnate of the state; it's understandable that that assault followed the model the Shuiskii themselves had taught him. On December 29, 1543, Ivan ordered the senior boyar adviser, Prince Andrei Shuiskii, seized and thrown to the doogkeepers."<sup>6</sup> With this decisive action, Ivan asserted his authority over the venal boyars.

In the next years, he resolutely moved against the boyars: in 1546 and 1547 the young sovereign ordered the execution of several treasonous boyars; in 1547 he had himself crowned tsar and he married; in 1549 and 1551 he roundly criticized the boyars' misrule in two councils; thereafter Ivan initiated reforms to redress their excesses and capped it all off by conquering Kazan' in 1552. This heroic tradition has been passed to Western students of Russia in film through Eisenstein's high melodrama and in scholarship through textbooks and historical monographs.<sup>7</sup> The grand prince, then, by dint of personality and the authority of his sovereignty, restored stability. Implicitly, "normal" Muscovite politics accorded a legitimate political role to the sovereign alone.

A literal reading of Muscovite sources suggests no other conclusion. Compositions written shortly after the events in question propounded it with un-

4. S. F. Platonov, *Ivan Groznyi (1530-1584)* (Petersburg: Brokgauz-Efron, 1923), p. 38.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

6. S. M. Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*, 29 vols. in 15 bks. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959-66), VI, bk. 3, pp. 429-30. See also N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva russkogo*, 12 vols. (St. Petersburg: V voennoi tip. Glavnogo shtaba ego Imp. vel., 1817-26), VIII, 79.

7. Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation in Two Volumes*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1953), I, 183-85; George Vernadsky, *The Tsardom of Muscovy. 1547-1682*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), I, 23-25; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 159; Gustave Alef, "Aristocratic Politics and Royal Policy in Muscovy in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries," *Forschungen zur Osteuropäischen Geschichte* [hereafter *FOG*], 27 (1980), 96. Bjarne Nørretranders comments that the boyars lacked a political program (*The Shaping of Czarism under Ivan Groznyi* [Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1964], pp. 85-86, 90). For popular history, see Robert Payne and Nikita Romanoff, *Ivan the Terrible* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975), pp. 58, 59.

flinching consistency. The protocols of the church council that met in early 1551 are probably the earliest such apology of autocracy: they were written beginning in late February of that year.<sup>8</sup> These lengthy protocols, which came to be called the "Stoglav," or "Hundred Chapters," record that Ivan IV addressed the assembled church prelates on the theme of the boyars' perfidy and that he acknowledged his own unsavory doings:

The boyars and magnates. . . did not give me good counsel. For I considered them well-disposed toward me, but instead they seized personal power for themselves. . . I was orphaned, and the tsardom was widowed, and so our boyars seized the opportunity for themselves, despotically governing the entire tsardom and no one prohibited them from every possible unseemly undertaking. . . I became accustomed to their insidious ways, and I grew cunning, just like them. From that time until now, what evils have I not committed before God.<sup>9</sup>

Further condemnation of the boyars' evil ways and assertion of the sovereign's dynamic role in politics can be found in an essay probably written in the 1550s and incorporated into the "Book of Degrees" (*Stepennaia kniga*) in the early 1560s.<sup>10</sup> Here the young tsar is again credited with bringing order to a state beleaguered by the boyars' profligacy.<sup>11</sup> The history appended to the Chronography of 1512 strikes the same note forcefully in its account of a so-called "council of reconciliation" in 1549: the young sovereign upbraided the boyars for their perfidy and ultimately forgave them. It was written by the 1560s.<sup>12</sup>

The most striking example of this trend in historical writing is the "Brief Chronicle of the Beginning of the Tsardom," composed between 1553 and 1555.<sup>13</sup> This short history of Ivan's reign from Vasili III's death in 1533 to the aftermath of the Kazan' campaign in 1553 misses no opportunity to cre-

8. Jack E. Kollmann, Jr., "The Moscow *Stoglav* ('Hundred Chapters') Church Council of 1551," 2 vols., unpub. Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Michigan, 1978, ch. 3, esp. p. 132. Translation by Jack Kollmann.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

10. A. A. Zimin, "K izucheniiu istochnikov *Stepennoi knigi*," *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* [hereafter *TODRL*], 13 (1957), 228, 225. Although this version is found in an early-seventeenth-century miscellany, Zimin considers it primary because of its "greater concreteness" and detail.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

12. The dating is based on watermarks said by M. N. Tikhomirov to be of the 1550s or 1560s (S. O. Schmidt, ed., "Prodolzhenie khronografa redaktsii 1512 goda," *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 7 [1951], 254-99; dating on p. 256; the "council" described on pp. 295-96).

13. Zimin and Kloss adhere to N. F. Lavrov's dating (A. A. Zimin, *I. S. Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki* [Moscow: AN SSSR, 1958], p. 29; B. M. Kloss, *Nikonovskii svod i russkie letopisi XVI-XVII vekov* [Moscow: Nauka, 1980], p. 195).

dit the sovereign with expurgating the evils of boyar rule, just as it condemns the boyars for their violence and corruption. Here, for example, the beginning of the end of boyar rule is heralded when Ivan allegedly orders the execution of Prince Andrei Shuiskii: "Grand Prince Ivan Vasil'evich of all Rus' was no longer able to endure that the boyars had perpetrated disorder and willful rule without the grand prince's permission, by their own initiative on the advice of their own like-minded counsellors, and that they had carried out many murders of their own accord and had inflicted many degradations on the land in the sovereign's youth. And the great sovereign ordered that their senior counselor Prince Andrei Shuiskii be seized and thrown to the dogkeepers."<sup>14</sup> This composition was incorporated and subsequently edited in both versions of the Nikon chronicle and later in the Illuminated Chronicle. All its revisions heightened the theme of boyar perfidy and grand-princely autocracy.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, evidence that Ivan IV played a formative role in Muscovite politics abounds in the correspondence attributed to Ivan and the emigrant Prince Andrei Kurbskii, as well as in the *History* attributed to Prince Kurbskii. In Ivan's response to Kurbskii's initial epistle, traditionally dated 1564, he bitterly detailed the sufferings he had experienced in his youth at the hands of the boyars.

But when I had entered upon my eighth year of life and when thus our subjects [the boyars] had achieved their desire, namely to have the kingdom without a ruler, then did they not deem us, their sovereigns, worthy of any loving care, but themselves ran after wealth and glory, and so leapt on one another [in conflict]. And what did they [not] do then! . . . [He describes their murders and seizures of property] . . . But as for us, together with our only (-begotten) brother Georgii, who has departed this life in sanctity—they began to feed us as though we were foreigners or the most wretched menials. What sufferings did I [not] endure through [lack of] clothing and through hunger! . . . But when we reached the fifteenth year of our life, then did we take it upon ourselves to put our kingdom in order and thanks to the mercy of God our rule began favourably.<sup>16</sup>

14. *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* [hereafter *PSRL*], 37 vols. to date (St. Petersburg-Moscow-Leningrad: various publishers, 1841-1982), XXIX (1965): 45 (7052).

15. The "Brief Chronicle" was incorporated into the Patriarchal manuscript of the Nikon chronicle (*PSRL*, XIII: pt. 1 [1904], 75-267) and in part into the Obolenskii manuscript of the Nikon (pt. 1, 140-267). This incorporation occurred between the late 1550s and 1563, according to Kloss (*Nikonovskii svod*, ch. 6). From 1568 to 1575, according to Kloss (*ibid.*, ch. 7), the Illuminated Chronicle was compiled using the Obolenskii manuscript of the Nikon; ca. 1575, interpolations were added to its final volume, known as the "Synod copy" (*PSRL*, XIII: pt. 1 in variants; pt. 2 [1906], 303-408 [*passim*]). That manuscript was in part recopied and in part separated to form the *Tsarstvennaia kniga* but no further editing occurred (Kloss, *Nikonovskii svod*, ch. 7, pts. 1, 2, 5).

16. J. L. I. Fennell, ed. and trans., *The Correspondence between Prince A. M. Kurbsky and Tsar Ivan IV of Russia, 1564-1579* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 73, 75, 81.

From Kurbskii's *History* come more details of Ivan's fabled dual personality in an account unflattering to the sovereign. Whereas Ivan himself in his speech to the Stoglav council had attributed his cruelty to the example of the boyars, Kurbskii calls it evidence of Ivan's own evil character. Kurbskii says that Ivan, from an early age, tortured dumb animals and in his teens turned his cruelties against people.<sup>17</sup> In all these compositions the historian finds ample testimony to Ivan's forceful personality and his direct involvement in the politics of his time, as well as harsh condemnations of the purposeless corruption of the boyar elite.

But this interpretation is so politically naive as to raise doubts about its literal accuracy. In these years, after all, Ivan was a child and adolescent. He was too young to have performed most of the acts which the chronicles blithely attribute to him<sup>18</sup>; he most likely did not deliver the speech at the *Stoglav* council<sup>19</sup>; sources that attribute to him a decisive action are often contradicted by others.<sup>20</sup> The logic of politics also discredits this interpretation. How could the young Ivan have forcefully controlled an ambitious and violent boyar elite so suddenly? Admittedly a thirteen-year-old Ivan could have ordered Prince Andrei Shuiskii thrown to the dogs. But that murder was followed rather promptly by a restoration of political stability that would have required Ivan to have garnered the support of a decisive fraction of the competing boyars and their allies. The sources suggest that he won such support because of his personality, his charismatic sovereignty, and his terroristic use of violence. Yet, as we shall see, Ivan's personality is difficult to perceive, the resolution of the minority did not involve excessive physical force and significant numbers of boyar competitors were not banished. Stability was restored by a complex interplay of grand prince and factions of boyars representing broad networks of lesser political figures.

A more complex understanding of political relationships must be brought into play. Although sources reveal it only indirectly, few would dispute that the boyars had a dynamic and legitimate role in politics. Sources suggest something of the boyars' political position: they advised the sovereign and were his trusted comrades.<sup>21</sup> They were the state's primary military and ad-

17. J. L. I. Fennell, ed. and trans., *Prince A. M. Kurbsky's History of Ivan IV* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 8-15.

18. *PSRL*, XXIX, 128 (7042); 129, 130 (7043); 131, 132 (7044); 132-34 (7045); 135 (7048, 7049).

19. Textual evidence in the protocols suggests that the speech was written by an ecclesiastical compiler (Kollmann, "Moscow Church Council," pp. 163-86).

20 See below.

21. M. D. Priselkov, comp., *Troitskaia letopis': Rekonstruktsiia teksta* [hereafter *TL*] (Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1950), pp. 439 (6900), 451 (6907); *PSRL*, XXV (1949), 215-18 (6897); *PSRL*, VIII (1859), 74 (6908); *PSRL*, VI (1853), 271 (7052); *PSRL*, XIII, pt. 2, 522-26 (7061).

ministrative leaders. Narrative sources generally accord the boyars an honored role as counsellors,<sup>22</sup> although in times of disorder they condemn them for giving bad advice or disregarding the sovereign.<sup>23</sup>

Even these idealized images convey the real political significance of the boyars. These were the men who ruled the state behind the scenes when the grand prince was incapable of rule. Minorities occurred once a century, in the lives of Dmitrii Donskoi (1359-66), Vasilii II (1425-33), Ivan IV (1533-47) and Ivan V and Peter I (1682-89). Tsars were sometimes incapable of military or political leadership, as in the last thirty years of Vasilii II's life, when he was blind, or the entire reign of apparently feeble-minded Fedor Ivanovich (1584-98). Even though the sovereigns in these periods were credited with leadership,<sup>24</sup> it was in fact the boyars who managed domestic and foreign policy. They did so as well when the grand prince was adult and healthy. There were tangible reasons why they enjoyed a share in decision-making and administration. Muscovy's army was, after all, composed of boyars' retinues until the late fifteenth century. Even after that, when the bulk of the cavalry was supported with grants of land on service tenure from the sovereign's land fund, boyars remained the chief military commanders, the holders of high offices, and the chief beneficiaries of Muscovy's wealth and power. Muscovy's social development offered few sources of alternative political support: a high-handed sovereign in the sixteenth century would have had a hard time bypassing the boyars. The army was under their control, the bureaucracy was small, and the merchant class politically insignificant. In contrast to the simple autocracy presented by narrative sources, court politics involved dynamic interplay and a complex division of power. Why, then, did contemporary writers, aware of the realities of power, not describe politics more forthrightly?

In the case of the works attributed to Ivan IV and Prince Andrei Kurbskii, one can answer that question variously. If one accepts Edward L. Keenan's ar-

22. Examples include *TL*, p. 369 (6856); L. V. Cherepnin and S. V. Bakhrushin, eds., *Dukhovnye i dogovornye gramoty velikikh i udel'nykh kniazei XIV-XVI vv.* [hereafter *DDG*] (Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1950), No. 3, p. 14 (1353); *TL*, p. 384 (6874); *PSRL*, XXVI (1959), 187 (6940); 213 (6964); 225 (6977); V. I. Buganov, ed., *Razriadnaia kniga 1495-1598 gg.* [hereafter *RK*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), p. 68 (7030); *PSRL*, VIII: 287 (7043); 290 (7043).

23. *PSRL*, XV, pt. 1 (1922), col. 65 (6864); *TL*, p. 439 (6900); *PSRL*, XXVI, 200 (6954); *PSRL*, XXIX, 10-11 (7042); 29 (7050); 32 (7046); 45 (7052); 46 (7053); 48 (7054).

24. Examples: Donskoi's minority (*TL*, pp. 378, 380, 384 [6970, 6871, 6872, 6874]). Vasilii II's minority (*PSRL*, XXVI: 186 [6937, 6938]; 187 [6939]). Blind Vasilii II (*PSRL*, XXVI: 213 [6962]; 213-14 [6964]; 215 [6964]; 217 [6968]). Fedor Ivanovich's rule (I. O. Iakovleva, ed., *Piskarevskii letopis'*, in *Materialy po istorii SSSR*, 7 vols. [Moscow: AN SSSR, 1955-59], II, 88, 90, 91, [7092, 7093, 7094, 7095, 7102, 7099]).

gument that the "Correspondence" is not authentic, but that it evolved in the seventeenth century as a series of political pamphlets composed by disenchanted aristocratic intellectuals and their opponents,<sup>25</sup> then one would argue that the works represent a summation of a chronicle tradition established long before the time of the pseudo-Kurbskii writings. Thus, these writings' rich evidence on Ivan's personal development—his deprived childhood, his cruelties, the internecine squabbles he witnessed—should not be taken as reliable contemporary sources.

There are strong arguments in favor of Keenan's position. Aspects of the documents he has singled out—the patchwork nature of the first Kurbskii letter, the possible priority of Kurbskii's writings to the sources identified in it, the patterns of manuscript survival, the Polonisms and Grecisms of their language—point to the seventeenth century. These works, furthermore, are anomalous in sixteenth-century political and literary writings. No other narrative statements on the nature of government written by participants exist<sup>26</sup>; no personal letters survive except a few by Vasilii III inquiring on the health of his son. Furthermore, the Ivan and Kurbskii writings contain little new information and no factual detail that could not have been derived by a seventeenth-century writer from old chronicles; in some details, the writings are contradicted by other sources.<sup>27</sup> The Kurbskii and Ivan writings read like a Gothic novel by an author steeped in the chronicle tradition of the "Brief Chronicle of the Beginning of the Tsardom" and its successors through the interpolations in the Illuminated Chronicle.<sup>28</sup>

25. Edward L. Keenan, *The Kurbskii-Groznyi Apocrypha: The Seventeenth-Century Genesis of the "Correspondence" Attributed to Prince A. M. Kurbskii and Tsar Ivan IV* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971); *idem*, "Putting Kurbskii in His Place, or: Observations and Suggestions Concerning the Place of the *History of the Grand Prince of Muscovy* in the History of Muscovite Literary Culture," *FOG*, 24 (1978), 131-62. See also some of Keenan's replies to critics: *Kritika*, 10 (1973), 1-36; *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* [hereafter *JGO*], N. S., 22, No. 4 (1975), 593-617; *Slavic Review*, 38, No. 1 (March 1979), 89-91, and *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 16, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 95-112; see also the symposium published in *Russian and Slavic History*, eds. Don Karl Rowney and G. Edward Orchard (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1977); see Donald G. Ostrowski's useful reviews of Lur'e and Rykov's *Perepiska* in *Kritika*, 16, No. 1 (Winter 1981), 1-17 and of Rossing and Rønne in *Russian History*, 9, pt. 1 (1982), 121-26.

26. Norretranders comments on the lack of articulated political programs from boyars (*Shaping of Czardom*, p. 90). Peresvetov's and similar essays are not by participants; see Norretranders' discussion of them (*ibid.*, pp. 101-09). Edward L. Keenan stresses this point ("Muscovite Political Folkways," *Russian Review*, 45, No. 2 (April 1986), 145-48.

27. See, for example, Fennell, *History*, p. 11, n. 5; p. 14, n. 1. Kurbskii calls Syl'vestr Ivan's confessor, but he was not (Fennell, *History*, p. 159; cf. Fennell, *Correspondence*, p. 25, n. 6). Kurbskii also identifies the age of fifteen as Ivan's move into politics, yet attributes to him in that year an execution that numerous sources place three years earlier (Fennell, *History*, pp. 10-11).



Even if one accepts the correspondence and *History* as authentic sources by an individual personally acquainted with Ivan, one should question whether the view of political relations they present is realistic. Those writings attributed to Ivan maintain the traditional autocratic theory of politics. Even Kurbskii follows this path: he does not argue for aristocratic rule, but implores the sovereign to rule humanely and to depend on wise counsellors.<sup>29</sup> The writings attributed to Kurbskii are vindictive and strident concerning Ivan's personality, full of lurid detail unconfirmed by other sources. Given Prince Kurbskii's incentive to impugn Ivan's character, we cannot accept his portrait of Ivan uncritically, just as we similarly should not credit Ivan's exaggerated claims to autocratic power.

Vindictiveness and autocratic pretensions are not the only reasons why the writings attributed to Kurbskii and Ivan present less than a straightforward account of the politics of the minority. The genre of narrative political writings in Muscovy also shaped these accounts. Muscovite compositions of court politics—from chronicles, to the *Stoglav*, to the Kurbskii-Ivan writings, to the tales of the Time of Troubles, even to Kotoshikhin's account of the court around the 1660s—all followed prescribed models of political relations that precluded describing politics as the pragmatic balancing of interests among leaders representing various social groups. Their purpose was to convey not reality, but didactic models: such writings demonstrated ideal Christian behavior and depicted the natural order of things in society at large.<sup>30</sup>

In so doing such writings also implicitly impart a theory of proper political relationships. They depict the Kremlin court as an apolitical community that depended upon the piety of its rulers and their advisors for its stability and that suffered chaos and Godly punishment from their moral turpitude. The political sphere was an undifferentiated, harmonious community in which each social group played a specific role. The sovereign was the sole decision

28. Kloss comments on the similarity in ideas and text of the interpolations and Ivan's first letter (*Nikonovskii svod*, pp. 255-58). Critiques of Keenan's view include R. G. Skrynnikov, *Perepiska Groznogo i Kurbskogo. Paradoksy Edvarda Kinana* (Leningrad: Nauka, Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1973); Niels Rossing and Birgit Rønne, *Apocryphal-Not Apocryphal? A Critical Analysis of the Discussion Concerning the Correspondence Between Tsar Ivan IV Groznyi and Prince Andreij Kurbskij* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1980); Ia. S. Lur'e and Ia. D. Rykov, eds., *Perepiska Ivana Groznogo s Andreem Kurbskim* (Moscow: Nauka, 1981). Charles Halperin's two review essays summarize some of the main points (*JGO*, N. S., 22 [1974], 161-86 and 28 [1980], 481-99).

29. Fennell, *Correspondence*; Nørrertranders, *Shaping of Czardom*, chs. 2, 4, 5.

30. Edward L. Keenan makes this analysis of Muscovite historical writings ("The Trouble with Muscovy: Some Observations upon Problems of the Comparative Study of Form and Genre in Historical Writing," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, New Series, 5 [1974], 103-26).

maker; the boyars and church hierarchs offered him advice on secular and religious affairs. The metropolitan mediated for mercy in political competition. Metropolitan and boyars alike served as links between the community and the sovereign, just as the sovereign was the link between the community and God. Dissension was condemned as sin; rational political calculation and the balancing of interests had no place in this idealized political world.<sup>31</sup>

Daniel Rowland has analyzed this political ideology as it appears in the historical tales of the Time of Troubles. Characterizing it as "God-dependent," Rowland notes that such a system of beliefs leaves no legitimate political role for social groups or institutions, nor does it tolerate political interplay, compromise or disagreement. The tales present, according to Rowland, "no substantial disagreement within literate Russian society over the nature of the state and how it should be run," and thus define a politics whose goal is only the pursuit of stability, not the coordination of conflicting groups.<sup>32</sup> These observations uncover aspects of the goals of Muscovite politics and of its reality.

The Kremlin court was constantly animated by factional competition that occasionally broke out into open violence. From the mid fifteenth-century succession crisis that erupted into internecine civil war, to the frequent disruptions that resulted in a boyar's being excluded from political life in "disgrace" (*opala*), to the fierce conflicts of the minority, the anarchy of the Time of Troubles and the court rivalries of the 1640s and 1680s, the ambitions of the sovereign dynasty and boyar families fueled competition and compromise in an ever changing equilibrium of power relationships. In contrast, Muscovite political writings promoted a formulaic image of politics, smoothing over political complexities with the veneer of the sovereign's omnipotence.

The idealized autocracy of the sources, however, was not the mere wishful thinking of ecclesiastical writers steeped in Byzantine Caesaropapism. It had some relation to reality. The authors of these sources, after all, ranged from church clerics to scribes and military servitors; the court in addition lived out the facade of autocracy in rituals and symbolism. We can learn a great deal from the implicit messages of these oblique sources, for they reveal the values that shaped political struggle and political stability in Muscovy.

Such sources suggest real political relationships: for example, metropolitans are depicted as interceding for mercy, intimating their essentially moral and symbolic role in politics. Boyars are praised as comrades or vilified as sin-

31. Nørretranders (*Shaping of Czarism*) illustrates these themes in both Ivan's and Kurbskii's writings. Daniel Rowland explores the ideology ("The Problem of Advice in Muscovite Tales about the Time of Troubles," *Russian History* 6, pt. 2 [1979], 259-83).

32. Rowland, "Advice," pp. 283, 281-82.

ners, reminding us that Muscovy relied not on public, legal guarantees to structure politics but used personal loyalties instead. Chronicles describe boyar factions by their family affiliation, not their class or policy stances, indicating a likely means of analyzing political struggle.

The sources' depiction of the grand prince as a literal autocrat, on the other hand, moves from reality to symbol. We know there was conflict at court and that sovereigns were not always capable of single-handed rule. Yet the sources' crediting Ivan IV with the restoration of order implies that normal political functioning involved no dissension, no interest groups, no balancing of power. Although not realistic, this was the ideal of power and the image helps us understand how political conflict was handled in Muscovy. The sources' castigation of boyars for not counselling the sovereign with other boyars, for being too exclusively associated with the sovereign, or for acting without the sovereign's knowledge,<sup>33</sup> similarly single out political activities that disrupt harmony among boyars. The implication is that competition was always tempered with compromise, stability valued over personal ambition. The sources thus reveal some of the underlying values of the pragmatic and decidedly disharmonious court political community.

But the dictates of such writing make it difficult to distinguish the formulaic from the real. Since most activities are attributed to the sovereign, and since all events are explained in black and white moralistic terms, should we dismiss such accounts as rhetorical fantasies tailored to fit a formulaic genre? Hardly. Not only do narrative and chronicle sources on Muscovite politics reveal the ideals that underlay political struggle and relationships, they also provide reliable factual material. Chronicles in various traditions, for example, provide a fairly consistent chronology of events and a fairly good record of the individuals involved in political life. That record can be confirmed by evidence from military service books, diplomatic records, and assorted documentary sources.

We discussed earlier the didactic purpose of narrative sources on politics; alongside such moralizing, political sources often conveyed partisan political interests. Chronicles promoted the interests of their patrons, be they the bishops of Rostov or Riazan', the archbishop of Novgorod or superiors of major monasteries; the grand-princely court also patronized chronicle composition, particularly in the sixteenth century.<sup>34</sup> In reference to the minority of Ivan IV, chronicles contain two or three different partisan viewpoints that help us identify the participants in court political struggles.

33. Not giving counsel (*PSRL*, XXIX, 37 [7048]). Not informing tsar (*PSRL*, XXIX: 32 [7046]; 42 [7050]; 45 [7052]; 46 [7053]). Too exclusive (*PSRL*, XXIX: 42 [7050]; 32 [7046]).

34. Two good monographs on chronicle writing are: Ia. S. Lur'e, *Obshcherusskie letopisi XIV-XV vv.* (Leningrad: Nauka, Leningradskoe otделение, 1976); Kloss, *Nikonovskii svod*.

The dominant chronicle tradition of the sixteenth century is that which was worked out in the aftermath of the minority. Just as the newly sovereign Romonovs after their accession to the throne in 1613 commissioned historical works to discredit the governments of Godunov and Shuiskii, so also the government that restored order after the minority produced self-justifying historical works. The Iur'evs, Bel'skii and their allies promoted a chronicle tradition best exemplified in the "Brief Chronicle of the Beginning of the Tsardom" and its successors<sup>35</sup>; its immediate purpose was to preclude further boyar rivalry by discrediting the struggles of the minority and legitimizing the new ruling circle behind the tsar.

This is particularly evident in that chronicle's treatment of important moments in the minority struggles. In 1533, for example, Prince Iurii Ivanovich, next younger brother of the just-deceased Vasilii III and a possible collateral contender, was arrested and imprisoned. In the account found in the "Brief Chronicle of the Beginning of the Tsardom" and its later redactions, blame for this tragedy is placed not on Iurii himself nor on the grand princess and her young son, but rather on the boyars. Led by Prince Andrei Shuiskii, they are said to have instigated a plot in favor of Iurii. The chronicle besmirches even boyars loyal to the grand prince by suggesting that they advised the grand prince to execute Prince Iurii; the guilt for shedding royal blood, then, is wholly on the shoulders of the boyars.<sup>36</sup> This penchant for justifying strong leadership against perfidious boyars is enhanced in subsequent redactions of this chronicle: in accounts of the arrest and subsequent death in 1542 of Prince Ivan Bel'skii, the "Brief Chronicle of the Beginning of the Tsardom" lays the blame on the Shuiskii, but later editions reinforce the point by adding many names of Shuiskii collaborators in the dastardly deed.<sup>37</sup> This pattern is repeated in accounts of the immediate provocation to Andrei Shuiskii's murder in 1543.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in the account of the execution in 1546 of three prominent boyars, the "Brief Chronicle of the Beginning of the Tsardom" justifies the grand prince's order of the execution by suggesting that he received bad advice from an evil advisor, while later redactions of this text add details about the evil deeds of those killed, further exonerating the grand prince.<sup>39</sup> Finally, in an oft-quoted passage, a later redaction of the "Brief Chronicle of the Beginning of the Tsardom" adds to the in-

35. On the ideology of these compositions, see Zimin, *Peresvetov*, pp. 29-41.

36. *PSRL*, XXIX, 10-11 (7042).

37. Cf. *PSRL*, XXIX, 42 (7050) with *PSRL*, XIII: pt. 1, 140-41 (7050) and pt. 2, 439-40 (7050).

38. *PSRL*, XXIX: 45 (7052) with *PSRL*, XIII, pt. 2: 443, 444 (7052) and *PSRL* XXIX, 144 (7052).

39. Cf. *PSRL*, XXIX, 49 (7054) with *PSRL*, XIII, pt. 1: 149 (7054) and pt. 2: 448-49 and *PSRL*, XXIX, 147 (7054).

cident when Grand Prince Ivan throws Shuiskii to the dogkeepers the potent phrase, "And from that time on the boyars began to fear the sovereign."<sup>40</sup> Leaving aside the predictable emphasis on autocracy promoted by this compendium, the Shuiskii's dominant role in factional struggle in the minority cannot be disputed; it is seconded by documentary sources.<sup>41</sup>

A parallel chronicle tradition preceded this one and was patronized by the Shuiskiis, providing further evidence of factions in the minority struggles.<sup>42</sup> The pro-Shuiskii Voskresenie Chronicle strikingly contrasts with the "Brief Chronicle of the Beginning of the Tsardom" in its account of the arrest in 1533 of Prince Iurii Ivanovich. The Voskresenie was compiled in the 1540s; in this affair it portrays Prince Andrei Shuiskii as the loyal servant who informed the grand princess of Prince Iurii's planned treason. Here the royal family does not escape unscathed as it did in the "Brief Chronicle of the Beginning of the Tsardom": not only is Prince Iurii portrayed as capable of treason, but Grand Princess Elena and her son Ivan are given full responsibility for ordering Prince Andrei's arrest and eventual death in prison.<sup>43</sup> The compiler of the Voskresenie Chronicle did not idealize the royal family as the "Brief Chronicle" of the 1550s did; his real animus was directed against the Telepnev-Obolenskii family, which is depicted as untrustworthy.<sup>44</sup> This is understandable, given that the Shuiskiis rose to power in 1538 by dispersing the Obolenskii faction.<sup>45</sup>

On other issues, these partisan redactions fall back on predictable formulae, often improbably attributing the events of the minority personally to the underage sovereign. Other chronicles of this era do the same, but occasionally they contain further information on political factions that is consistent with the documentary record of political activity. The continuation of the Chronography of 1512, for example, says that boyars, not the sovereign, ordered the murder in 1543 of Prince Andrei Shuiskii.<sup>46</sup> Most chronicle accounts attri-

40. *PSRL*, XIII, pt. 1: 145 (7052).

41. On the Shuiskiis in positions of leadership, see *Sbornik Imp. Russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* [hereafter *SIRIO*], 35 (St. Petersburg, 1882); *Akty feodal'nogo zemlevladieniia i khoziaistva*, 3 vols. (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1951-61), I, No. 222; *RK*, pp. 77, 78; *PSRL*, VIII, 277 (7039); *SIRIO*, 59 (Moscow, 1887), No. 5, p. 44; *PSRL*, XXIX, 38 (7049).

42. S. A. Levina, "O vremeni sostavleniia i sostavitele Vokresenskoi letopisi XVI v.," *TODRL*, 11 (1955), 375-79; Levina's dating is based on the fact that the last entry is 1541 and on other internal indications (pp. 375-76).

43. *PSRL*, VIII, 286 (7042).

44. *PSRL*, VIII, 292-95 (7045).

45. *PSRL*, XXIX, 32 (7046); 135 (7046); M. N. Tikhomirov, ed., "Zapiski o regentstve Eleny Glinskoi i boiarskom pravlenii 1533-1547 gg.," *Iz*, 46 (1954), 285 (7046).

46. Schmidt, "Prodolzhenie," p. 289 (7051).

bute to the sovereign the orders for executions in 1546 and 1547,<sup>47</sup> but one account identifies the Glinskii faction as responsible for the execution of Princes Obolenskii and Dorogobuzhskii in January 1547.<sup>48</sup> Chronicles variously identify the forces responsible for the arrest in 1538 of Prince Ivan Bel'skii and the murder of the scribe Fedor Mishurin. While one formulaically reports that the grand prince (who was then eight) ordered it,<sup>49</sup> many others attribute the arrest to the Shuiskiis and numerous allies.<sup>50</sup> Accounts disagree on whether the boyars, the Shuiskiis in particular, or the grand prince himself ordered the execution of Prince Ivan Ovchina Obolenskii in 1538.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, some formulaically report that Metropolitan Daniil was deposed in 1539 by the nine-year-old sovereign's order, while others cite the Shuiskiis in this as well.<sup>52</sup>

With such a plethora of explanations, it is difficult to distinguish historical fact from formulaic flourish or partisan sniping. Whether Ivan IV personally ordered Prince Andrei Shuiskii thrown to the dogs, what role the Obolenskii and Shuiskiis played in Prince Iurii Ivanovich's arrest, how much treason Princes Iurii and Andrei Ivanovich were guilty of, who ordered a particular murder, what decisions Ivan IV personally made—these questions can probably never be answered. But these sources do narrow down the cast of characters to the Shuiskiis, Bel'skiis, Telepnev-Obolenskii, and Glinskii, with allies and secondary players mentioned as well. They also establish a consistent sequence of events comprising fifteen years of struggle, murder, and shifting alliances. They give us numerous clues about how politics worked at the Muscovite court.

Combining the factual information from narrative and documentary sources with evidence of the factions identified in various accounts, one can create a consistent interpretation of Ivan's minority, with the aid of an interpretive understanding of court politics. For historians are constantly interpreting their data by their understanding of its historical milieu, just as they conversely modify that understanding by increasingly sensitive readings of the sources.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 290, 291, (7053, 7054); Tikhomirov, "Zapiski," pp. 286, 287 (7054); *PSRL*, XXIX, 47, 49 (7054).

48. Schmidt, "Prodolzhenie," p. 291 (7055).

49. *PSRL*, XXVI, 318 (7047).

50. *PSRL*, XXIX, 34; Tikhomirov, "Zapiski," p. 285; *PSRL*, XXIX, 135; *PSRL*, VIII, 295 (all 7047).

51. These credit the grand prince (*PSRL*, XXVI, 318 and A. N. Nasonov, ed., *Pskovskie letopisi* [hereafter *Pskov*], 2 fasc. [Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1941-55], 1, 108 [both 7046]). This credits the "boyars" (Tikhomirov, "Zapiski," p. 285 [7046]). These credit the Shuiskiis (*PSRL*, XXIX, 32, 139 [7046]).

52. These credit the grand prince (*PSRL*, XXVI, 318 and *Pskov* 1: 109 [both 7047]). This the boyars (Schmidt, "Prodolzhenie," p. 288 [7047]). These the Shuiskiis (*PSRL*, XXIX, 34; *PSRL*, VIII, 295; *PSRL*, XIII, pt. 1: 98-99; *PSRL*, XXIX, 135 [all 7047]).

Several conceptual frameworks are available for interpreting Muscovite politics. One is the traditional view discussed above, which dismisses the minority struggles as anarchy brought on by the selfish power grabbing of the boyars and which depicts the sovereign as the dominant player. Although pre-revolutionary scholars saw class struggle in some of the conflicts of Ivan's reign, it took second place to personal qualities (leadership, selfishness) in their explanations of political struggles. We have discussed above why that interpretation seems politically naive.

Soviet scholars have, with a few notable exceptions,<sup>53</sup> rejected the "great man" implications of pre-revolutionary studies of Ivan's time, endeavoring to replace that paradigm with one grounded in historical materialism and class struggle. They have been unable, however, to arrive at a consistent interpretation of Ivan's reign using this approach. Recent scholarship has, for example, rejected the rigid class analysis exemplified by I. I. Smirnov. He considered the minority conflicts a retrogressive struggle for "feudal" decentralization by boyars and appanage princes aligned against the sovereign's and gentry's desires for centralization. Scholars like A. A. Zimin, N. E. Nosov and others, on the other hand, reject Smirnov's view that the principal political conflict of Ivan's time concerned centralization, arguing rather that the rival factions represented aristocracy and gentry struggling to control the centralized apparatus. Influenced by S. B. Veselovskii's prosopographical method and non-Marxist interpretations, recent Soviet scholars also tolerate a more flexible reading of political struggle, admitting that boyars, lesser servitors, merchants, and city populations often allied in contradiction to their class interests. Nevertheless class struggle between a "princely-boyar aristocracy" eager to protect its rights and a gentry class clamoring for political recognition remains their general explanation of this era, although they are hard-pressed to associate particular boyars unambiguously with one or the other class stance. All Soviet scholars agree, however, that the impetus to resolve the minority was not Ivan's dynamism, but the popular unrest of 1547 and the growing political power of the gentry.<sup>54</sup> Their interpretations, not surprisingly, heavily

53. Biographies of Ivan written in Stalin's time idealized the individual over material circumstances and class relationships (R. Ia Wipper, *Ivan Groznyi*, revised ed. [Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1944]; S. V. Bakhrushin, *Ivan Groznyi*, in *Nauchnye trudy*, 4 vols. in 5 [Moscow: AN SSSR, 1954-55], II, 256-328 [first published in 1942]; I. I. Smirnov, *Ivan Groznyi* [Leningrad: Gospolitizdat, 1944]). They were roundly criticized in 1956 by Kurmacheva ("Ob otsenke").

54. I. I. Smirnov, *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Russkogo gosudarstva 30-50-kh godov XVI veka* (Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1958), pt. 1; N. E. Nosov, *Ocherki po istorii mestnogo upravleniia Russkogo gosudarstva pervoi poloviny XVI veka* (Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1957), A. A. Zimin, *Reformy Ivana Groznogo* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1960), chs. 5-7; S. M. Kashtanov, "Feodal'nyi imunitet v gody boiarskogo pravleniia (1538-1547 gg.)," *IZ*, 66 (1960), 239-68 and *Sotsial'no-politicheskaia istoriia Rossii kontsa XV-pervoi poloviny XVI v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), chs. 5, 6. R. G. Skrynnikov, *Ivan Groznyi* (Moscow: Mysl', 1975).

stress the "contradictions" in the socio-economic circumstances that prevented the predicted class relationships from developing fully: A. A. Zimin's characterization of the leadership after Ivan's minority as a "government of compromise" comprising both aristocrats and gentrymen is typical of the difficulty of applying a predetermined class analysis to the evidence of this period. These studies stretch the Marxist paradigm to its extreme.

There is no doubt that materialistic self-interest played a role in the minority struggles, but the current Soviet attempts to fit such motivation into a scheme of class conscious aristocratic and gentry struggle cannot be accepted. The division of rival factions according to political program (aristocratic land and tax privileges vs. centralization) cannot be substantiated; Zimin himself notes many circumstances in which men on one side of the fence promoted policies favorable to the other.<sup>55</sup> Kashtanov's work represents a throwback of sorts to Smirnov's more dogmatic approach, but his attempt to see patterns of "appanage princely pretensions and princely-boyar separatism" in political struggle is similarly unsuccessful. His analysis of immunity grants during this period simply reveals that each successive governing faction maintained "progressive" policies of centralization and also distributed generous "feudal" privileges to major monasteries.<sup>56</sup> The supposed "social revolution" in the elite brought about by Ivan IV after the minority is also problematic: even Zimin has difficulty finding "gentry" in the government of compromise for, with the exception of the fabled Adashev and Syl'vestr, the new boyars and *okol'nichie* in the late 1540s and 1550s hailed from princely families or cadet lines of old boyar families.<sup>57</sup>

The attempt to identify class tensions among the leading boyars at court in the 1540s is doomed to failure, first because the elite at that time was simply not very differentiated. All of the leading families had heritages that can only be considered aristocratic, either because of sovereign princely backgrounds in Northeastern Rus' or the Grand Duchy (Bel'skiis, Shuiskiis, Kubenskiis,

55. See Zimin's contradictory explanation of the history of the brigandage reform (he says it was initiated despite their class interests by the Shuiskiis; he declares that the commission to regulate the reform was abolished and restored frequently by both sides, where one would more logically suspect incomplete survival of sources in the ten-year span) (*Reformy*, pp. 254-56, 258, 265 [no evidence for allegation of the commission's abolition], 312). See also Zimin's discussion of the years from 1543 to 1549: the once centralizing Zakhar'ins and Glinskiis are now "feudal" (*Reformy*, pp. 267-78, 301-13).

56. For the inconsistencies in his class analysis, see Kashtanov, *Sotsial'no-politicheskaia istoriia*, pp. 283, 292, 322, 326, 329, 334, 341-43, 347, 352-53, 367, 371-73, 375-76. Similarly Zimin shows that groups considered progressive granted charters, while "feudalists" sometimes rescinded them (*Reformy*, pp. 232-33, 251, 258, 263, 268, 270, 313).

57. Zimin falls back on *mestnichestvo* to explain the preponderance of princely and old boyar families in the enlarged elite (*Reformy*, p. 318).



Rostovskiis, Kholmskiis, Mstislavskiis, or because of long ancestry in the inner circle in Moscow (Iur'evs, Vorontsovs, Cheliadnins). Furthermore, significant policy differences cannot be associated with the factions identifiable in this era. Struggle from the 1530s to the 1540s was bitter, but it did not center around policy directions. The court maintained its administrative and fiscal control with the brigandage (*guba*) and provincial administration (*zemskii*) reforms, its juridical codification in the Law Code of 1550 and its expansion of bureaucratic institutions (*prikazy*). The boyar leadership grew more numerous, but the same families stayed in power through the entire century (Bel'skiis, Shuiskiis, Mstislavskiis, Iur'evs). New additions came from the same sources of old boyar or newly-arrived princely families. Totally new families, not derived from boyar or princely background, numbered a handful (Adashevs, Trakhaniotovs, Nagois).<sup>58</sup> Neither chronicles nor immunity charters reveal sharply divided classes nor groups separated by policy differences; the participants in the minority struggles were members of an elite agreed on the division of government who rivaled each other for greater shares of power and benefits.

The last few decades of Soviet scholarship shows the inadequacies of a class analysis of court politics, and indeed one Soviet scholar, V. B. Kobrin, has recently challenged this approach in terms similar to those detailed here.<sup>59</sup> A third conceptual framework can be elaborated on the basis of the implicit messages of the sources we have discussed above,<sup>60</sup> one which interprets factional politics without the overlay of a predetermined scheme of consciousness and historical evolution. One can understand court political relations and the struggles of the minority, as I have done in greater depth elsewhere,<sup>61</sup> in the following manner.

58. Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345-1547* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1987), ch. 5. Lists of the new boyars (A. A. Zimin, "Sostav boiarskoi dumy XV-XVI v.," *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik* [hereafter *AE*] *za 1957 god* [Moscow, 1958], pp. 59-72; Alef, "Aristocratic Politics," pp. 96-98 and appendix III); A. M. Kleimola, "Patterns of Duma Recruitment, 1505-1550," in *Essays in Honor of A. A. Zimin*, ed. Daniel Clarke Waugh (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1983), appendix I-III.

59. Crummey's analysis is more generous, but ultimately reaches this same conclusion ("Ivan the Terrible," p. 70). V. B. Kobrin, *Vlast' i sobstvennost' v srednevekovoi Rossii (XV-XVI vv.)* (Moscow: Mysl', 1985).

60. Such an approach is implicit in S. B. Veselovskii's work (*Issledovaniia po istorii klassa sluzhilykh zemlevaladel'tsev* [Moscow: Nauka, 1966] and *Issledovaniia po istorii Oprichniny* [Moscow: AN SSSR, 1963]).

61. Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics*, chs. 1, 4, 5; see also Edward L. Keenan's formulation of these themes ("Muscovite Political Folkways" and "Ivan the Terrible and His Women: The Grammar of Politics in the Kremlin," "Ivan the Terrible and His Women: Dowagers, Nannies and Brides [Cambridge, Mass., typescript, 1981]).

The minority struggles were not an aberration in a political system that was fundamentally autocratic; rather behind the facade of autocracy, boyars shared decision-making and leadership with the sovereign. Boyars and grand princes regarded their authority not as public service, but as shares in a productive enterprise. Court politics, accordingly, involved establishing a distribution of power and its perquisites among the boyars participating in politics and the factions they represented.

A status hierarchy among boyars determined the distribution of power and benefits; foremost were a handful of boyars in the inner circle, the most powerful and prestigious. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries that group was established in each generation by the grand prince's marriage.<sup>62</sup> Other boyars connived to arrange alliances with boyars of the inner circle or to capitalize on events like Ivan's minority to win a sovereign marriage alliance. In the meantime, stability was ensured because all boyars agreed on the inequitable distribution of power established by the previous generation's Daniilovich marriage. This was the real source of the harmony implicit in idealized source accounts. "Consensus within hierarchy," "stability through equilibrium"—these might have been slogans for the Muscovite boyar elite.

In the 1530s, when Vasilii III and his wife died, the inner circle of royal in-laws was too weak to maintain its hold on power. In the 1530s the inner circle that had been constituted by the sovereign marriages of 1505 and 1526 included the Iur'ev, Cheliadnin, and Telepnev-Obolenskii families. None, however, had a genealogical link with the heir to the throne during Ivan's minority; struggles ensued as boyars aspired to construct a new ruling circle around his marriage. The conflicts became more violent in part because of Ivan's age: some fifteen years awaited before Ivan reached marriageable age. With the stakes so high, violence escalated.

The minority was resolved when Ivan IV was of age to be married and when the boyars could agree among themselves on a suitable hierarchy of power. Ivan's coronation might have reassured the outside world that autocratic stability had been restored, but his wedding achieved the actual consolidation of a new consensus in the political elite. Ivan's personal role in bringing about stability was likely limited: he may have been able to help forge consensus among the rival parties once he reached adulthood, but the boyars were capable of creating and maintaining stability when grand princes were not adult. In other minorities and times of difficulty, the boyars respected the established consensus on power relations.<sup>63</sup> Ivan's personal qualities were

62. On the inner circle and the role of sovereign's in-laws in establishing power relationships even in the seventeenth century, see Robert O. Crummey, *Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite of Russia, 1613-1689* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), Ch. 4.

63. For example, Donskoi's and Vasilii II's minorities (1353-66, 1425-33) and Fedor Ivanovich's reign (1584-98).

less important in the reconciliation of 1547 than was the act of his marriage. Once the boyars had agreed on a satisfactory distribution of power among themselves, Ivan married the woman who symbolized that status hierarchy; their marriage settled power relationships for at least a generation. The chosen bride, Anastasiia Romanovna Iur'eva, represented so politically astute a compromise among powerful families that one cannot accept the chronicles' romantic assertions that Ivan IV took it upon himself to marry at just that time and that he chose her from among hundreds of girls for her beauty.<sup>64</sup> Consensus was achieved where it had not been in 1538, when the Shuiskii had seized power and had married a distant kinswoman of Ivan IV; that marriage should have ensured their power, but it did not.<sup>65</sup> The struggles continued. In 1547, the elite families, politicking behind the scenes, forging coalitions and compromises, settled on a lasting distribution of power.

That Ivan IV's role as alleged in the sources is a function of the conventions of Muscovite political writing is evident from the aftermath of his wedding. Had he personally pursued the policies implicit in his harsh punishment of Prince Andrei Shuiskii, of the Vorontsovs and of other boyars, one would expect that they would have been excluded from power in favor of the Iur'ev faction. But, on the contrary, in the late 1540s and 1550s each major faction of the minority struggles was rewarded. Kinsmen of the inner circle in the Iur'ev and Bel'skii families were made boyars, but so also were men in the Shuiskii family and families associated with it, such as the Sheremetevs, Pronskii, and Pleshcheevs. Two of the several Daniilovich weddings of the late 1540s and 1550s involved the Shuiskii family: in September 1547 Ivan IV's brother was married to Princess Ul'iana Paletskaia, a distant in-law of the Shuiskii family; earlier that year the grand prince's court had sponsored the marriage of the daughter of a Shuiskii.<sup>66</sup> Many of the new boyars and *okol'nichie* that appeared at the court seem to represent continuity in factions and families that took part in the minority.<sup>67</sup> Factions in the elite expanded, but the larger number of boyars did not represent new social forces in politics. In the

64. Tikhomirov, "Zapiski," pp. 286-87 (7055); see also *PSRL*, XIII, pt. 2: 450-51 (7055) and *PSRL*, XXIX, 148-49. Similar idealized versions of Vasilii II's and Aleksei Mikhailovich's marriages (Ia. S. Iur'e, "Kratkii letopisets Pogodinskogo sobraniia," *AE za 1962 god* [Moscow, 1963], p. 444 (7015 sic); Grigorij Kotošixin, *O Rossii v carstovovanie Alekseja Mikajloriča*, ed., text, and commentary A. E. Pennington (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 19-29.

65. In 1538, after seizing power, Prince Vasilii Vasil'evich Shuiskii married Anastasiia, cousin of Ivan IV (*PSRL*, XXIX, 32 [7046]; Tikhomirov, "Zapiski," p. 285 [7046]).

66. *RA*, pp. 11-12; Tikhomirov, "Zapiski," p. 287 [7055]; *Akty istoricheskie, sohrannnye i izdannnye Arkheograficheskoi kommissiei*, 5 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tip. Ekspeditsii zagotovleniia gosudarstvennykh bumag, 1841), I, No. 146.

67. Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics*, chs. 2, 5.

reconstruction of a new structure of power, Ivan IV and the court elite strove for continuity and integration. As we have seen, so also did the numerous chronicle codices and historical compositions written after the resolution of the minority.

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In sum, the Muscovite sovereign was not a literal autocrat but shared a particular relationship with Moscow's boyar families in court politics. He was in some ways above politics, able to play numerous symbolic and real roles that structured political relations.

Since he was of a charismatic dynasty, the imagery of his exclusive rule symbolized the unity of the kingdom, presenting a useful front to foreign and domestic audiences. In the world of court politics, that same charismatic sovereignty, portrayed symbolically by the sources' insistence on the sovereign's literal autocracy, deterred boyars from aspiring to dynastic power; it thus set a limit on conflict among the boyars. That stabilizing boundary was only crossed when the dynasty died out in 1598; with the loss of a sovereign ruler anarchy gradually developed among the boyars.

As an individual, the grand prince further created stability by using his marriage to confirm the status hierarchy worked out by the political elite in each generation. Similarly, as an individual, because he was sovereign and beyond political challenge, the grand prince could stand apart from politics and mediate disputes, just as the metropolitan could. In real politics, the grand prince made policy and led the state. But he could not dictate unilaterally to the boyars, for doing so risked violence. The boyars were, after all, capable of armed revolt and willing to resort to it. Grand princes could use their personal authority to persuade, cajole and balance the ambitions of fractious boyars, but they did not rule without them. In sum, in contradiction to the image of the sources and of some interpretations, the boyars shared a legitimate political role. The grand prince acted in consort with the political elite, not in defiance or disregard of it. These are the structural roles in the system that any grand prince played.

But any individual grand prince's personal contribution, or that of any boyar for that matter, is obscured by the ideological dictates of narrative writing on politics in Muscovy. Ivan's personality is difficult to distinguish from formulaic attributions of autocratic power. His personal role in political struggle is similarly impossible to separate from that of other political actors.

68. Veselovskii similarly commented that families imposed pressure on members to conform in order to protect the family's honor and *mestnichestvo* status (*Issledovaniia po istorii klassa*, p. 475).

The Muscovite political system did not accord much attention to individuals; consensus within the family, faction, or court was a higher value.<sup>68</sup> Clearly an individual's talents made a difference in court politics: intelligence, skill, and dynamism helped boyars forge alliances and build consensus; similar leadership qualities allowed grand princes to create an effective governmental machine with the boyars. Is not Ivan IV's *Oprichnina* an example of the individual surmounting the consensus-oriented anonymity of the political system, perhaps even attacking it? But the Muscovite court did not choose to leave records by which we might perceive such political interplay. We should then be cautious of accepting source accounts of an individual's motivations and actions at face value, just as we should be wary of constructing an interpretation on what might be formulaic phrases.<sup>69</sup> We must read sources with sensitivity for the genre that dictated how they were written. Ivan's minority testifies to the complexity of relationships at the Kremlin court and to the intricate way sources simultaneously obscure and reveal that political system.

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69. For example, the fact that a metropolitan is depicted as pleading on behalf of a disgraced individual need not indicate his political proclivities; this was a traditional way of depicting metropolitans. Yet scholars have come to grief trying to use such evidence to prove a metropolitan's class sympathies: see Kashtanov's discussion of the succession of metropolitans in the 1530s and 1540s (*Sotsial'no-politicheskaia istoriia*, pp. 329, 338, 343, 345, 373).